

State Cost Share Committee Makes Changes

Submitted by Steven Olt

The Kentucky Soil Erosion and Water Quality Cost Share Program, also known as State Cost Share, is synonymous with the Division of Conservation in Kentucky's agriculture community. Over the past several years, producers in the state have been able to apply for cost share funding through this program to correct environmental problems on their land. Through this program, millions of dollars have been dispersed to landowners in order to implement best management practices.

In recent months, State Cost Share has undergone some major renovations to its ranking criteria and system in general. At the beginning of 2014, a committee was formed to analyze the ranking criteria and make suggestions and changes. This committee is comprised of members of federal, state, and local governmental agencies and was headed by the Division of Conservation Director Kim Richardson. The idea of renovating the program to bring it up to current standards was a desire of Richardson for quite some time. Some of the groups represented on the committee appointed by her include Division of Conservation, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Division of Water, and conservation districts.

The first meeting of the State Cost Share committee was held in Frankfort in March 2014. The initial process of analyzing the program proved to be very in depth with problems and concerns. However, after several hours of discussion, a plan for the program was reached, and implementation of changes began to occur. Another meeting was held in May in Elizabethtown, and the final steps were taken to correct the State Cost Share ranking form and criteria in order to have it completed in time for 2014 sign ups. Some of the corrections included having more accurate numbers for distances to waterways and sinkholes, simplifying standards for identifying polluted or endangered water bodies, placing across the board ranking values for each SCS practice, and identifying which practices have the most impact on the environment. Overall, the goal of the renovation was to make sure that each producer in the state continues to be fairly ranked against other producers and those rankings can be shown and justified to anyone who completes an application.

Since the last meeting of the committee, previous applications for the program have been entered into the ranking system in order to test the validity of the program itself. These "trial" runs of the program have been very successful in making certain that the program works as planned and only approves applications that are needed. The Division of Conservation would like to thank everyone involved in the program work and looks forward to continuing to help producers across the state with their environmental concerns through the State Cost Share program.